

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DR. BENEDICT K. ZOBRIST

AUGUST 30, 1990

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1990-6

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HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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## ABSTRACT

Dr. Benedict K. Zobrist was the assistant director of the Harry S. Truman Library for two years before becoming the director in 1971. He retired in 1994. As director, Zobrist worked to develop the library as a research institution. At the request of Margaret Truman Daniel, he directed his staff to complete an inventory of the Truman home in 1981 and 1982, then oversaw the transfer of the home from the National Archives to the National Park Service after Bess W. Truman's death in October 1982. Zobrist discusses his relationship with Harry and Bess Truman, his work as director of the Truman Library, and his memories of National Park Service employees with whom he worked to develop Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

Persons mentioned: Harry S Truman, Philip C. Brooks, Margaret Truman Daniel, Edgar Hinde, Sr., Bess W. Truman, E. Clifton Daniel, Jr., Rose Conway, Paul Burns, Lyndon B. Johnson, Wallace H. Graham, Paul Miller, Tom Evans, Ernest Connally, Hazel Graham, Arthur Mag, Donald H. Chisholm, Norman J. Reigle, Thomas P. Richter, Pat Kerr Dorsey, Elizabeth Safly, J. Edgar Hoover, May Wallace, Sue Gentry, Ardis Haukenberry, Thomas G. Melton, Robert L. Hart, Ike Skelton, Tom Eagleton, Steve Harrison, Clay Bauske, Samuel Gallu, Ronald Mack, William Southern, Mamie Eisenhower, and John Whitman.

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

### DR. BENEDICT K. ZOBRIST

HSTR INTERVIEW #1990-6

JIM WILLIAMS: This is an interview with Benedict K. Zobrist. We're in the conference room at the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, on the morning of August 30, 1990. The interviewer is Jim Williams, a park ranger at Harry S Truman National Historic Site, and also present is Michael Shaver, a museum aide at Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

First of all, Dr. Zobrist, I'd like to know if you are a native of Independence?

BENEDICT ZOBRIST: No, I'm not. I'm a native Illinoisan. But a Midwesterner. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Could you describe briefly your education and employment experience before coming to work for the National Archives?

ZOBRIST: [chuckling] How many hours do we have? You can take that one off the tape. In my education I have a B.A., an M.A., and a Ph.D., all in history, plus postdoctoral study at, oh, at least six institutions. And I'm also proud of the fact that I have also been through the senior executive program at the government in Charlottesville.

In my background, as far as my professional experience is concerned, I started with the Library of Congress in their manuscripts division, and so that's probably the reason that I've always been interested in manuscripts and libraries, and of course in history. After I left the manuscripts division, I worked for a period with the Newberry Library of Chicago, which was a very

fine experience, and then I spent approximately seven years as the command historian of what was the United States Army Weapons Command. And then I was a professor for about nine years, and I was also the chairman of the history department at Augustana College, and so it's from that background that I came to the library in 1969 as the assistant director, and I became director in the fall of 1971. And I might just tack onto that that Mr. Truman died fourteen months after I became director, and I feel like I've been on a merry-go-round ever since.

WILLIAMS: Who was the director before you were?

ZOBRIST: His name was Dr. Philip Brooks, and he had spent all of his career in the National Archives. He had joined the National Archives in the early 1930s when the archives was formed. And, of course you realize this is the second presidential library, and it's the first presidential library that really came into existence under the Presidential Libraries Enactment, so this library really cut a lot of new ground when it came into existence. And I also might say that the library really led the way in a lot of innovative things, you know, setting the pattern for what libraries were to be in the future.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe Dr. Brooks's relationship with the Trumans?

ZOBRIST: It was not a very good relationship, and I don't know all of the background of it, but it was not a very good relationship. I recall that while I was at the library that Dr. Brooks, and I don't think I'm exaggerating, was just simply terrorized when he knew that Margaret Truman Daniel was going to visit the library.

WILLIAMS: So he did not have a good working relationship with any of the family?

ZOBRIST: No.

WILLIAMS: And you don't really know why that was?

ZOBRIST: Well, if I could surmise about this . . . And then let me say that I think very highly of Dr. Brooks. He is a very fine gentleman. He was very kind to me, and I would give him great credit, as I have previously alluded to, for really establishing the foundations of this library and doing a lot of pioneering things in the whole presidential library realm. I sense that the problem is that Dr. Brooks was too "GI," if I may put it that way. In other words, he felt that he was very, very strictly bound by government regulations, and when you're dealing with a president and a presidential family, you just don't do it that way.

WILLIAMS: Would you describe yourself as a Truman scholar before you came to work here?

ZOBRIST: No, but my background is in modern diplomatic relations, and the twentieth century is my field. Although Truman was not really a specialty, certainly the postwar period, diplomatically speaking, was very much my field, and I had written articles in that area. I think also the background that I had as a command historian and writing about the military history during that period, that certainly I had no problems in, say, just moving over a little bit into the Truman field.

WILLIAMS: How well did you know Harry Truman?

ZOBRIST: [chuckling] I never met him until I came here. Often when I identify myself, certainly in the early years, I was asked that question because I think many people feel that my position is a political plum or something like that. I was selected off of a government register, and the story that was told to me by Dr.

Brooks himself is that when I had been selected by the National Archives, and in fact I had been interviewed by Dr. Brooks, that Dr. Brooks took my records down to Mr. Truman. Of course, you realize at that time that Mr. Truman was no longer coming up to the library, and Dr. Brooks said that Mr. Truman's comment was: "If he's good enough for the government, he's good enough for me." And if I may, I'd like to tell the story of the first time that I met him.

WILLIAMS: Please.

ZOBRIST: I came to the library in August of 1969, and when I knew that I had been accepted for this job, and of course it had been a hectic year because not only was I chairman of the department but I was associate dean and I was in charge of the school's summer programs that we were running abroad and all kinds of things like that. But during the summer I did take the time to start trying to get boned-up a little bit more on Mr. Truman, and when I dipped into his memoirs in more detail, to my great surprise I realized that Mr. Truman's battery, when Battery D came back from France after the First World War, came back on the very same ship that my father as a naval officer was assigned to, and the ship is the U.S.S. *Zeppelin*. The ship was a German intern liner. I inherited from my father, who had been deceased for a number of years, many photographs from his career in the Navy. And believe it or not, here was a great big, like about a two-and-a-half-foot by one-foot photograph of the U.S.S. *Zeppelin*. So I took that along with me when Dr. Brooks took me down to meet [Mr. Truman] for the first time.

And Mr. Truman, again if I may just divert for a moment, I was very

impressed in meeting Mr. Truman. I would have to say that having grown up, and of course I had been in service during the Second World War, anyone who had grown up hearing and knowing and reading about President Roosevelt with his wonderful, eloquent speeches, his fireside chats, when you would hear Harry Truman with his Midwestern sort of nasal twang, and how he would occasionally stumble over words, I was not really all that impressed with Mr. Truman as an individual. But, let me say that when I met him for the first time I was greatly impressed.

I met him in the little side room, the study, and there I saw him with stacks of books around him that I'm certain that he enjoyed reading very much. But even though he was somewhat infirm, he stood up and he gave me a very, very firm handshake. And what I remember very much are his eyes, those sparkling blue eyes. And indeed, as soon as he shook my hand and greeted me, I knew exactly what the term *charisma* meant. So I was very much impressed with him at that first meeting. He was very cordial, very polite.

I would say that I felt that he was very informed about the library, and I might also add this. You know, in subsequent years, many people have asked the question: "Well, what did Mr. Truman do in his retirement, and what was he interested in?" And the answer is: He was very, very interested in the library and what was going on at the library, new collections that we were receiving, what were the scholars writing, and so forth and so on.

But to continue the story, after I had been introduced to him, I presented him with this photograph of the U.S.S. *Zeppelin*, and he was very

pleased to receive it, but he returned it to me immediately and said, “You take this back up to the library,” and so indeed that’s what I did. But it was even a more interesting meeting for me because while Dr. Brooks and I were meeting with him and chatting with him and talking about the library, through the back door came Edgar Hinde, Sr., who was the postmaster of Independence. And of course Edgar Hinde had been an old, old friend of Mr. Truman, and the two of them had served overseas. And of course Mr. Hinde being such a friend, he didn’t come in the front door. I mean, he just wandered in through the kitchen door, and he was considered part of the family. Well, in any event, Mr. Truman showed him this photograph of the U.S.S. *Zeppelin*, and for a few moments it was most interesting to see the two men reminiscing about their return voyage. And the one thing that I do remember is both of them recounting what a, in their words, “rough rider” the ship was, and apparently it was a rather wild journey when they came home.

WILLIAMS: How long were you there for that visit?

ZOBRIST: Oh, I would say perhaps twenty minutes to a half-hour.

WILLIAMS: And the whole visit was in the study?

ZOBRIST: Yes, that’s right. And I did not meet Mrs. . . . I don’t recall meeting Mrs. Truman at that particular time.

WILLIAMS: Did you come in the front door or the back door?

ZOBRIST: Yes, we came in the front door. That’s right.

WILLIAMS: How many times did you visit with Mr. Truman before he died?

ZOBRIST: Well, I really have no count, but Dr. Brooks and I, while he was still at the library, would go down, oh, I’d say every couple of months and have a chat

with him. I went down individually after Dr. Brooks retired, but only for a very few times, and indeed when Mr. Truman's health took a turn for the worse, the visits were canceled.

The one experience or visit of his that I really do remember very vividly is a visit that he and the family made to the library. And you see, he died in 1972, and so this was the year before, in December of 1971. The library had just completed a half-hour film, a, let's say, general orientation film, a film that described the decisions that were made during the Truman period. Also it covered the '48 campaign and a number of other related administration events. But we had just received that film a few weeks before.

And I should really start at the beginning of the story, in that it was that December that Margaret and Clifton and the boys came out, and the family, I think, just had a very, very nice Christmas season. But Clifton Daniel called me about the day before . . . We did this on . . . it must have been Christmas Eve or the day before Christmas Eve. Clifton called me and said that Mr. Truman would like to visit the library. And I said, "Fine." Clifton said, "I want you to arrange it so that we will do it after-hours"—that is, after five o'clock—and he said, "just dismiss all of the staff that you can dispense with," which indeed I did. Of course, I did not tell the staff that the Trumans were visiting after five o'clock, but they came up about a quarter after, twenty after, and I was the only one here, plus the security people that we had. And I also recall that Clifton said, "Don't make it obvious, but you really ought to have a wheelchair handy," in case Mr. Truman would need one, and so I arranged for that as well.

Well, they arrived and it was just really a rather dark, dreary, wintery night. I don't recall if there was snow on the ground, but it was just not a very pleasant night. But they arrived and I . . . First of all, we had just received in our collection one of the Lincoln limousines out of the presidential fleet. And at this point in time it had not been restored, but we had it out in what was then the garage of the building, which would be next door to where we are sitting, and of course now completely changed. So I walked them out to the garage for him to see the limousine, and he just enjoyed that very much. And then we walked back into the library, we walked down the hallway, and I took them into the auditorium, and although I don't know much about rolling films, I got to do all of the honors that night, and fortunately . . . They sat right in the middle of the auditorium, the whole family. The boys did not come, by the way, but Mrs. Truman did come, and I went up to the projection booth and I pushed all of the right buttons and it happened, and it just worked beautifully! And after I got the film rolling I came down and I sat behind the Truman family, and I could just hear him chuckling and commenting. He just thoroughly enjoyed the film. And after the film was completed, then we walked through the rest of the museum, and then they left. And he did not . . . He walked the whole way. And I think he just thoroughly enjoyed coming up to the library because, to the best of my knowledge, he had not physically been in the building since his health no longer permitted him to come up, and that would have been 1966. And of course we're talking about 1971. But it was a delightful visit.

I might also add, while we're talking about visits, that in preparing for

the annual board meeting—that is, of the Harry S. Truman Library Institute—which we hold in . . . then we were holding it in March of the year, I went down to the house and had a brief visit with him. Then I had another occasion to go down and see him, if I remember correctly, in May of that year, '72, and of course that's the year that he died in December. And I would have to say that of all of the visits with him, that last visit in the spring of '72, the year he died, was the visit that I found him really the most alert and the most articulate.

WILLIAMS: Were all of your visits in the study?

ZOBRIST: Yes.

WILLIAMS: On these visits, did you notice any changes really in the house, the way things looked?

ZOBRIST: No. No, there were no changes. In fact, moving on a little bit, after Mr. Truman's death and when Mrs. Truman was alone, occasionally Margaret would call me and tell me that her mother wanted to redo the kitchen or might want to redo one of the other rooms in the house, and I very strongly discouraged her from doing that, to say the very least. And so I would say that the house as I saw it is just exactly the house that you have today.

One other thing I might add is that I think that sometimes when people see the house today that they think that the park service has phoned it up, in terms of the hall tree in the back hall there with Mr. Truman's coat and cane and hat hanging there. But I would say that even after Mr. Truman's death when I would visit the house, that's exactly the way I would see it. And so, you know, really nothing has been changed, and I can assure you that . . . I

would assure the public that you people are presenting the house very accurately.

WILLIAMS: You said that Margaret told you that Mrs. Truman was interested in redecorating?

ZOBRIST: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Do you think that was really Mrs. Truman's wish, or was it maybe Margaret speaking for her?

ZOBRIST: I would say it was Mrs. Truman, because as soon as I would discourage Margaret . . . That's the way I would read it, let's put it that way.

WILLIAMS: So you think Mrs. Truman did have a genuine interest in sprucing the place up a bit?

ZOBRIST: I think she did. That's the way I would react to the conversations I had. You know, along that line, and you may be asking me this later, but do let me say that I think that even after Mr. Truman's death that by that time that Mrs. Truman, although I was not privy to the will at that time, but I'm certain that it was the full intent of the family that the home go to the government.

One of the little sidelights that I would have to deal with from time to time is . . . I can't recall the gentleman's name, but the person who did the painting and took care of the home, let's say the outside of the home, and I'm certain I could find the name of this individual, and you may have even interviewed him, but I recall him every once in a while either coming up to the library or calling me and just saying, "Can't we do something about the house? The house is just falling apart!" And he would say, "I'm really almost literally keeping the house together with baling wire and chewing gum." And of

course you realize at that time that the government had no responsibility and could expend no money for the care of the home, and I just had to bolster his morale and tell him to do the best job he could.

And thinking about that period, and I'm moving ahead in the story, you may have some questions you may want to come back to, but another issue that I would . . . The library and I being the people on the scene, so to speak, we were the ones that got the public comments and the public complaints. Mrs. Truman sometimes would not get the grass cut in a timely fashion, and I would get complaints about that as to why isn't the government taking care of this or that. And of course I would have to try to deal with that diplomatically, too. But I think that we realize that Mrs. Truman was way up in years, and I think we all realize the difficulty of getting responsible help to do things, and Margaret was of course in New York throughout this whole period.

Although, while I'm on that point, many times I would get comments from the community about "Well, why doesn't Margaret come out and spend more time with her mother?" and "Why doesn't she visit more often?" that type of thing. I think many people felt that Margaret was neglecting her mother. And what I would certainly point out here is that you have to remember that Margaret has four sons. Margaret had a lot of family responsibilities during this period. I know that for a fact that she spoke with her mother on the telephone several times each week, so Margaret was always totally in touch, and also she was in touch with the friends and the neighbors who worked with Mrs. Truman.

WILLIAMS: When Mr. Truman was still alive and you would visit, who controlled the schedule? Did you have to make appointments?

ZOBRIST: Well, yes. The way that it was handled is that we still had Rose Conway here at the library, and as you know, she was the president's longtime secretary, to say the least. And really, when we would go down and see Mr. Truman, all of the arrangements, the appointments, etcetera, etcetera, were made through Rose. And indeed when we wanted letters signed by Mr. Truman or wanted books autographed or anything like that—he was very good about that—it was Rose who handled all of that.

WILLIAMS: We need to pause briefly.

[End #4135; Begin #4136]

ZOBRIST: Not at that time, but you realize that as long as Mr. Truman was living, his presidential . . . whatever the term is, allowance, provided for her. And after Mr. Truman died, the library took her on our staff, and she continued to support Mrs. Truman. As you can imagine, over the period while the Trumans were still living, there was still quite voluminous correspondence. I got to know Miss Conway quite well, but I think that we all realize that she was a very, very private person. She really dedicated her whole life to Mr. Truman and to the Truman family, and as hard as we tried, we could never get her to do an interview. And indeed even after her death she left very, very few things of any significance, in terms of papers, mementos, or anything like that. I would describe her as really one of those faceless, dedicated women, totally devoted to Mr. Truman.

WILLIAMS: What were your dealings with the Secret Service while Mr. Truman was still

alive?

ZOBRIST: Well, that's another interesting story. The Secret Service had already arrived on the scene before I came, but . . . I'm telling you now both a story that has been told to me, and of course I will also be speaking about firsthand experience after I came to the library in 1969. Presidents did not receive Secret Service protection, of course, until after the Kennedy assassination. And I have been told that the first group of agents, I would imagine three or four people that were sent out, that the Trumans just did not like them at all. And I don't even know the names of these individuals, but the Trumans were *never* enthusiastic about the Secret Service. And of course you realize that the city of Independence had provided protection for the president essentially in terms of Mike Westwood. But to continue with the Secret Service, the Trumans didn't like the group that was sent out, and so they sent them back. They went back to Washington. And then the Secret Service sent out another group of Secret Servicemen, and I believe this group was headed by Paul Burns. You know, I hadn't expected to talk about some of these things, so I don't have perhaps a lot of these things at my fingertips. But I knew Paul, and he was a very fine person with a very outgoing, optimistic sort of fun type of personality, and so the Trumans accepted the second group that was sent out.

However, the Trumans would not permit them in the house. And I'm telling you this because you asked the question, you know, "How did the library relate to the Secret Service?" Well, what happened is that the Secret Service was given a room at the library. In fact, the room that we gave them was the room next to the garage, which is now my administrative secretary's

office. And you realize at the time that the library administrative operation was on the far side, which would be on the west side of the building. Then you have the Truman Wing, the Truman Administrative Wing here, and of course we're sitting in the conference room, and then you'll see next to the garage, to the east of us, was the room where the Secret Service operated. And it was a pretty bare-boned room, to say the very least, but what they had done is to install television monitors. And so they had, I think, at least the state of the art at that particular time, the 1960s. They had the state-of-the-art television, and also they had all types of electrical as well as electronic devices for opening and monitoring gates and doors and things like that. But what it meant, and we just really kidded these guys a lot, they would spend most of the day up here monitoring the television, and they, of course, with their cars they would swing by the Truman home occasionally. And then these poor guys, winter or summer, rain, shine, whatever, snow, they sat out in an automobile right on the street during the night to watch the Truman home. And that was their life for a number of years.

Let me divert for a moment, in that I think that a lot of times the public really questions the need for this type of protection. But let me say that even after all of those years Mr. Truman would still occasionally get an intimidating or a threatening letter and kooky types of things. I can remember one, a woman who would write Mr. Truman from California, and she claimed that she had been secretly commissioned a five-star general, and she would sign her letters as "Generalissimo . . ." I don't recall the name that she used, but she would send letters occasionally. You know, not to divert into this, but all

of these elements were checked out by the Secret Service. But in any event, I can assure you that even after all of those years, this type of thing would go on.

Well, let me get back to the Secret Service. The Secret Service, the next phase that they went through is that they got a van, and so that made it a little bit easier for them to operate and to monitor the home. But of course we razzed the living daylights out of them, saying that, well, gee, they got a van so that they could go fishing on weekends. However, the change really came with the Secret Service in the protection that they could provide when they were able to secure on a rental basis the home immediately across the street. But again, you see, the Trumans would not tolerate them in the home. But at least the Secret Service had a place where they could visually see the home, and they could monitor it a lot easier, and they didn't have to sit out in their cars all night. It was quite a sophisticated operation. All of their monitors were moved down there, and their whole operation was transferred down there. And see, they had a big sort of front window in the home, and that's really where their operational desk was, and there was always an operator sitting at that desk monitoring the front gate and the front door.

And I recall at that time when I . . . Well, at that time, my visits were still . . . I guess you might say on a formal basis, in that I did not come in the back door. But I would go to the front gate, and of course telephone arrangements were made previously, and I would always wave and signal over, and somebody would push the button and the buzzer would . . . you would hear it and the gate would be opened.

But I guess just one last thing I would say, the Trumans, the whole family, liked Paul Burns, and his people very much, and I think that it was a good relationship. I would have to say though that I felt very sorry for Paul Burns because I think it was sort of like your organization and like the military, that you don't want to get stuck in an assignment for the rest of your life, and I think that Paul had the Truman assignment for, oh, seven to nine years, something like that—in other words, far beyond his tour of duty—and I don't think that helped him career-wise. But on the other hand, he was the only person that the Trumans would accept. Later, he switched with the man who headed President Johnson's security, and so there was eventually a turnover. But I think that tells about the Secret Service.

I might mention one further thing that comes to my mind, and getting us closer to the time of Mrs. Truman's death. Toward the end, I'd say about the last three years of Mrs. Truman's life, there was a lot of turnover in Secret Service staff. And I guess you can understand that, because Mrs. Truman was no longer going out and so she didn't need escorts or that type of thing, and I'm certain that the Secret Service used this as sort of a, what, introductory or indoctrination, that type of basic training for the young fellows that were coming into the system.

WILLIAMS: Were you ever in the Secret Service house on Delaware?

ZOBRIST: Oh, yes, many times.

WILLIAMS: Why would you go into the command post?

ZOBRIST: Well, I would simply go down to visit the fellows [chuckling] from time to time. But more than that, I think that you need to realize that there was a lot

of planning with reference to Mrs. Truman's funeral, and how . . . You know, we haven't touched on that at all, but even before Mr. Truman died, going back to that early period, I would have every single week two or three meetings with the Army, with the Secret Service, with GSA, and my staff, in terms of the planning for the funeral, as well as the funeral director.

WILLIAMS: When Mr. Truman visited the library, you said in the winter of '71, I believe, was the Secret Service with him then? Did they generally escort him?

ZOBRIST: No. No, they didn't. I don't recall any Secret Service being there at all, although they probably were monitoring the visit. But no, it was just strictly the family.

WILLIAMS: When did you first meet Bess Truman?

ZOBRIST: I met her in the subsequent visits down to the house.

WILLIAMS: And how would you describe her reception to you?

ZOBRIST: Oh, very cordial. I liked Mrs. Truman very, very much. She had an excellent sense of humor, she was easy to talk with, as Mr. Truman was, and even in subsequent years when I would telephone her, when she was no longer really that active and getting out, I always had just really very good telephone conversations with her because I felt that she had such a nice, friendly disposition.

WILLIAMS: At the time of Mr. Truman's death, were you in the home afterwards, around the time of the funeral?

ZOBRIST: No, I don't recall that I was, not during that period, not in December or January of that . . .

WILLIAMS: You didn't accompany any of the dignitaries to the house?

ZOBRIST: No.

MICHAEL SHAVER: To back-pedal a little bit, you talked about all the planning that had gone into this for a good number of years.

ZOBRIST: And we can talk the next hour on that one!

SHAVER: I think you're the only library director that's had the honor or horror of having to plan a state funeral twice. As I remember you saying at one point in time, and I've read in other places, there was a rather elaborate plan in the works.

ZOBRIST: Yes.

SHAVER: There were weekly meetings. In fact, Dr. Graham almost had the scenario of how things would probably happen with Mr. Truman. When did you have to essentially tear up the notebook and start all over again?

ZOBRIST: Oh! [chuckling] Can we close this part of the tape? [laughter] You know, I haven't thought about this for a long time. You know, really, to pick up on what you're saying, from where I sat, I sort of felt like I was in the center of this storm that was swirling all around me, so to speak. In my observation, the state funeral for President Truman was, in essence, run by the Army. And the person there, and indeed you might want to interview him, was Paul Miller, Colonel Paul Miller. You know, I would say that I was literally thrown into this as soon as I came to the library.

And of course I will tell the story that others have probably told, of how President Truman was finally gingerly approached by the military and some of his old friends, and really it was Tom Evans who was the key to the situation, and told that, "Well, you really ought to be making plans." And as I understand it, they finally did have one large meeting in his office, and it was at

that meeting that he told them where he wanted to be buried, and apparently he pointed right out to the courtyard where he wanted to be buried. They described, I guess in some detail, what a state funeral would be, and they did it in a very somber fashion, very seriously, a very serious fashion. And Mr. Truman supposedly cracked up the whole group by making a comment to the effect that he was so impressed with all of the planning that he wished he could be there.

But getting on with the story where I . . . See, the title of the whole plan is called the “O Plan Missouri.” The “O Plan Missouri” was a book the size of a Sears and Roebuck catalogue, and it was written in that much detail.

I was brought into this as soon as I came to the library, and to repeat what I had said before, every single week there were two or three meetings. And I would have to say that, knowing my background that I’ve already described, I absolutely had no training in this type of thing *at all*. And quite frankly, there was a time after several months that I just really became very depressed from working with all of this, because it just went on and on *and on*. And everything was planned in such extreme detail, and plans were reviewed, and then re-reviewed. I guess I should have stated previously that the Army has a special unit at Fort . . . I can’t think of it, in Washington—it’ll come to me—but it was then headed by Colonel Miller. And that’s all this unit did was plan state funerals. But to continue, Paul Miller would come up periodically and re-review plans. I would have to say that we were all in touch with each other continually. For the first time in my life, I had to carry in my billfold telephone numbers of all of these people. When Mr. Truman’s health really started

deteriorating, if I went out of town, if I was beyond a telephone call, I had to inform Colonel Miller. In other words, we were all very closely in touch with each other.

Also, I think you need to realize that Mr. Truman's health started deteriorating, and then it went on for months. And of course, dealing with the Army, with GSA, as well as the Secret Service, you would have new officers and new individuals coming into the picture and older ones retiring and leaving, and so it was a continual process of reviewing and updating.

WILLIAMS: How much input did Mrs. Truman and Margaret Truman Daniel have in the funeral plans?

ZOBRIST: Very little at the outset. The instructions that Mr. Truman gave was that they were not to be bothered or really to be consulted about this. I just have the feeling that this was something that he just did not want to burden them with. And so that's the reason that things were so hectic in the very last days, because, you see, the family in essence had not been privy to a lot of this stuff. And then when we got to the point, there was a lot of changing. In fact, I with some of my key staff . . . When Mr. Truman . . . when his death was imminent, we were working complete weekends, updating lists and things like that.

WILLIAMS: How did you find out about his death?

ZOBRIST: [chuckling] It's interesting, and of course somewhat disappointing, if I can put it that way.

WILLIAMS: Let me guess, a reporter called you. [chuckling]

ZOBRIST: No! [chuckling] Here I had been following everything so closely and had

been in telephone touch with everyone, and at that time I lived in Independence, about twelve or fifteen minutes away from work, and I got in the car that morning and the news came over the radio that morning, and so I heard it on the radio driving to the library. But of course we knew that it was imminent, but to me it was just very much of an anticlimax.

WILLIAMS: So once he had died, the family did make modifications to the plans?

ZOBRIST: They did, but this is something that I really cannot speak directly to because you realize it's the senior service, the Army's responsibility, and so it was Colonel Miller who really at that point in time dealt directly with the family. And then after Colonel Miller had briefed the family on what the scenario would be, it's at that time that I began receiving direct instructions from Margaret.

WILLIAMS: Let's get back to more happier memories.

ZOBRIST: Yeah. [chuckling] But do let me say this. I know that this is not really what you came up to tape me about, and that is a total story that may not fall within your purview, but I could speak at least another hour on this subject, and we have good resources in our holdings. I would hope someday that someone would do a thesis on this, because it's an interesting subject, and it should be dealt with. But let's move on.

SHAVER: I might take the opportunity to do that again sometime.

ZOBRIST: If you want to spend another whole morning, we'll do that, okay? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: When you visited Mr. Truman in the home, did he or anyone else ever offer you refreshments?

ZOBRIST: No, these were always very businesslike meetings. And in fact, I might add

that by the time I came to the library I was not aware that the Trumans really did any entertaining or anything of that type.

WILLIAMS: When it was just Mrs. Truman then in the house, how often did you visit her?

ZOBRIST: That was much more infrequently, basically because she did not have the strong interest that Mr. Truman had. I might add that Margaret encouraged me to talk with her and call her periodically, and I think more to want . . . change her mind, I guess, and to let her know what was going on, to a certain extent. Because Mrs. Truman really did not get out of the house very much. Although, you know, let me say that in the years immediately after President Truman's death she did get out, I think, much more so in those years. Every once in a while I would hear someone say, "Oh, I saw her at the grocery store" and around town. I can remember my wife saying, "Oh, I saw Mrs. Truman leaving the beauty shop this morning," that type of thing. I don't consider myself any expert at all on what Mrs. Truman was doing during that period, but I think you need to talk with some of her lady friends and the people that lived down there, but it's my understanding that she led a very normal, active life and was very interested in what was going on in the community.

WILLIAMS: Did she ever come up here to the library?

ZOBRIST: Yes, she surprised me. she came up one day, one afternoon. It was in the summer. I can't even tell you what year. But I was surprised by that visit. She came up and she wanted to give me something, I don't recall what it was. She left the car out in the circle of the administrative entrance, and I took what she was giving me, and I said, "Well, won't you come in?" And I

brought her into my office, which is not my present office, but the office over on the outside of the building. And, uh, we had a very pleasant, you know, cordial conversation, but the thing that surprised me was that Mrs. Truman said, you know, I have never been in this office before.” So I have the feeling that . . .

[End #4136; Begin #4137]

WILLIAMS: When you visited Mrs. Truman in the home, where were your visits?

ZOBRIST: Oh, always in the study. I will take that back, there was one occasion that I do recall where we sat in . . . I don't really know what you call these rooms, the room to the right as you come in.

WILLIAMS: The big living room.

ZOBRIST: Yeah, the big living room.

WILLIAMS: And did you have staff members going down to the home to see Mrs. Truman?

ZOBRIST: No, not until . . . No, the answer is definitely not until . . . You know, she fell in the early summer of '81. And here let me tell you the story of our involvement, really, with the home. It's at that time when Margaret visited the home, and of course visited her mother, and of course she would have been out for our annual board meeting as well because by that time we were holding the board meetings in May, that Margaret expressed a concern with the home, that she had noted something was missing from the home. And I don't really even recall what it was. I think it was a small clock or something like that. And I think that she realized that her mother was having more difficulties, and she also realized that there were nurses attending Mrs. Truman

and also a continual stream of Secret Service in and out of the house, and it's at that time that she asked me to start inventorying the home very discreetly. And that was where my staff members entered into it. I say *staff members*, there were only three or four individuals, and these were longtime staff members that I had great faith in.

WILLIAMS: Before we get deeply involved in the inventory, I have a couple more questions.

ZOBRIST: Sure, go ahead.

WILLIAMS: Did Mrs. Truman have secretarial help at all?

ZOBRIST: Only Rose.

WILLIAMS: How long did that last?

ZOBRIST: Well, it lasted . . . I would have to say I draw a blank on that. I don't honestly remember. It lasted as long as Mrs. Truman needed secretarial help. Let me add something into that, in that right after Mr. Truman's death . . . You see, at that time Rose would still go down to the house and . . . [tape turned off] Okay, well, let me say that when Mr. Truman was living, and of course after his death, in the early years after his death, Rose continued in her office here, and she would go down to the home. But later on when correspondence started dropping off, and indeed Rose was having some health problems herself, the Secret Service would bring things back and forth. I guess you might say it doesn't fall officially under their duties and responsibilities, but this was a rather, what, uninspiring type of assignment, for openers, so indeed these Secret Service fellows . . . I mean they just enjoyed getting out and doing anything they could to help Mrs. Truman and to help the

library as well.

WILLIAMS: On your visits with Mrs. Truman, did you ever take her gifts or anything?

ZOBRIST: Not that I recall. I would take down occasionally our newsletter. It would be official things that I would take her.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever take her books from the White House Historical Association on first ladies and the White House?

ZOBRIST: I don't recall. I mean, if they went down, they would be sent down. I wouldn't do it myself.

WILLIAMS: We have several copies of these books, and we were wondering where they might have come from, from that period.

ZOBRIST: You know, again let me make another comment that I enjoyed Mrs. Truman very much. She was a wonderful person. I had excellent—when I say “I,” the library and I had excellent relations with her. I think that you have to remember that as I came into this job, and I'm not kidding when I said I feel like I have been on a merry-go-round, see, I had only been director fourteen months before Mr. Truman died, and I think that you need to realize that there were just massive administrative and library responsibilities that I had, in terms of processing new collections that we were receiving, you know, to say nothing of the subsequent reception of the Truman papers. I was, boy, up to my ears in library responsibilities. I had personnel issues and problems that I had to deal with. I was establishing new administrative policies and procedures and attempting to give the library newer direction. Just to give you one example, the library had never embarked on an acquisitions program for papers, and so this was a major undertaking. But this just gives you one

example of many, I guess we might say, initiatives and programs that I embarked on. For example, I wanted us to publish a more sophisticated and polished quarterly publication, and so, really, when you ask me these questions, you know, the bouncing ball that I was following was the administration of the library, and indeed Mrs. Truman was far from the center of my focus, to say the least.

WILLIAMS: You let on earlier that later on you came through the back door when you visited. Is that correct?

ZOBRIST: That's true, but this was at the time after we started inventorying, and Margaret had at that time given me and my selected individuals really complete access to the home.

WILLIAMS: One more thing before the inventory, when you visited Mrs. Truman, what did you visit about?

ZOBRIST: Well, that's interesting, I've been asked that question many times, and people expect me to give the answer that we talked about the weighty issues of the world. And the answer is we did not talk about the weighty issues of the world. It was more pleasurable conversation in which we talked about the town. We didn't talk about political issues, but we talked about the town, what was going on at the library, the weather, that type of thing. In fact, Mrs. Truman was very, I think, discreet in the conversations that she had with me. Again, I may be presumptuous in making an observation like this, but I think you need to remember that my predecessor did not have good relations with the family. I have always felt that my job was to build bridges with people, and I felt that my greater mission, if I may put it that way, was to get people

talking to each other. I wanted people to understand what we were doing at the library, and I wanted the Trumans to realize that the library was here to not only help enhance the image of Mr. Truman but basically to tell the story of his administration and tell the story of his life, and so I purposely avoided controversial issues. I can't really stress this enough, because in my estimation there was a lot of changing of opinions over the period from 1969 when I came to the library till the time in '71 when I became director, until '72, until you get past the death of Mr. Truman into Mrs. Truman's period where she is living at the home, where Margaret at that point in time perceived me and the government, in a sense, as not being the enemies but . . . I know this is somewhat of an overstatement, but perceived me and the library in a more positive light in what we could do.

WILLIAMS: Why do you think Margaret's opinion changed?

ZOBRIST: Well, again I don't wish to take undue credit or more credit than I should. It's a question I don't think that I can totally answer. I think that certainly part of it, in my estimation, would be the positive image that the library and I tried to project. I think that nothing is that simple. I think it's also a matter of Margaret perceiving that we did have a role to play in the memory of her father, and also in the transfer of the remaining papers and the transfer of the home to the government.

WILLIAMS: And at this time was she a member of the institute?

ZOBRIST: Oh, yes. In fact, President Truman had been the honorary . . . was the founder and the honorary president of the institute, and when Mr. Truman died, the board unanimously elected her to the board as an honorary member.

And she continues to be active in the organization.

WILLIAMS: Well, before Mr. Truman died, did you have any official contact with the National Park Service?

ZOBRIST: No. [chuckling] Well, no, let me back up on that. The answer is yes, I did. Really, it was a very delightful experience, and this is my acquaintance with Connelly—I can't even think of his first name.

SHAVER: Ernest.

ZOBRIST: Ernest. That's right, Ernest Connelly. In that the park service apparently had always wanted to recognize the Truman home. When the Trumans were first approached, the Trumans declined the recognition. And it was not until some years later that the park service, and namely Ernest Connelly, resurfaced the issue, and if I remember correctly, this was around the time of the bicentennial. But Mr. Truman was gone by that time. No, he was still living. The park service exchanged correspondence . . . Okay, it's all coming back to me now. Yeah, in fact this was even before I became director. The park service resurfaced this, it must have been in 1970 or early 1971, and at that time the Trumans stated that they were willing to have the park service recognize the home. But if I remember correctly, there were a couple of stipulations, and one would be that there would be no marker, and if I remember correctly, I think that there would be no particular publicity attached to the recognition. So, in other words, you see, even when the Trumans finally did say yes, it was in a very low-key fashion, to say the least.

But one other thing I do remember . . . You know, I wish I had known you were going to ask me about some of these things. I would have

surfaced some of these names. The park service sent out a couple of their historians, one a very distinguished gentleman, now retired. Can you give me any names?

SHAVER: I have that study, but I can't recall who wrote it.

ZOBRIST: But in any event, we gave these two fellows . . . I got such a kick out of this. We gave them an office down the hall in the administrative wing, and that's where they operated out of for a number of weeks. But this probably was the most unorthodox recognition that the park service handed out, to the best of my knowledge, in that they were never allowed to go into the home, and so everything was done, you know, remote control. But they spent many days surveying the district. And also I think that this is quite different because here you have a recognition that was initiated by the park service rather than coming up from down under, so to speak, as most of the recognitions are made. But I can recall visiting with these people, and they did a very thorough study. I was interested . . . To me, you know, I had not been at the library all that long, and let me say I am certainly not versed in how the park service operates and how it sets out districts, but I was most interested in the district that they did cut out, so to speak. And as I understand it, there was a small version and a large version, and if I remember correctly, the final selection was the smaller version of the area that had been marked out. And that was in the early '70s, and I would have to say . . . I mean, this is another long, complicated story that we could spend a whole morning talking about, but along with the Jackson County Historical Society—and the person that I would single out there specifically would be Hazel Graham—Hazel Graham

and I and some other historically-minded individuals in the community persuaded our mayor to establish the heritage commission, and that's how that whole thing was launched.

WILLIAMS: Did you have any other contact with the park service before Mrs. Truman's death?

ZOBRIST: No.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the provisions of Mrs. Truman's will before she died?

ZOBRIST: Yes.

WILLIAMS: How long before that did you know she was giving the house to the Archivist of the United States?

ZOBRIST: It was really a matter of years. And let's talk about that point.

WILLIAMS: So she wanted you to know?

ZOBRIST: Yeah, she did. And let me say that I wasn't all that happy about it at the time, and my people in Washington weren't all that happy about it at the time, basically because although there are a couple of exceptions in our system, we are not into the preservation business and into taking care of historical homes. And indeed I did express to the lawyer more than once, and quite strongly, that the will should be rewritten so that the home should go to the park service. And I can tell you that apparently . . . You know, I did not speak with Mrs. Truman about this directly at all. I did not feel that I had that . . . I did not feel comfortable in bringing up a subject that delicate with her, but I know that the idea was conveyed to her. But the point that I would make, and the interpretation that came back to me was that Mrs. Truman was comfortable with the National Archives and with the way that we had

administered the library, and that was the way she wanted it.

WILLIAMS: Was the attorney Arthur Mag?

ZOBRIST: Yes, and then subsequently Don Chisholm.

SHAVER: Did Mr. Mag come and visit you one afternoon, or call you, or did Mrs. Truman convey this, or Margaret convey this to you? How did you first find out?

ZOBRIST: No, Mag just simply sent it to me at the library. I would visit Mr. Mag periodically at his office, but I guess when I look back on those days, the . . . Well, Mr. Mag was cut out of a different cloth, I guess you might say, a very distinguished gentleman of an older generation. And although I never had any difficulties with Mr. Mag, he was always very pleasant with me, when Mr. Mag would speak it was like God speaking, so to speak. [chuckling] And so even though I would protest, it would always come back: "Well, this is the way Mrs. Truman wants it."

WILLIAMS: Did you ever try to talk to Mrs. Daniel about this provision?

ZOBRIST: No, because my relations with Margaret, I would say, were such that again this was an issue that I didn't feel comfortable in raising with her. Let me add a comment to that, in that Margaret was, over the years in this period, not the easiest person to deal with. And I know that she had a lot of other things on her mind, including the illness of her mother. There were other issues from the viewpoint of my organization, in terms of papers and other things that were really a higher priority with me in dealing and in negotiating with her. And if you prioritize all of these things, I guess I would just really have to say that at that point in time the matter of the will was not that high on the priority list.

WILLIAMS: Would you have agreed to use your employees to do the inventory if you had not known that the house was being left to the archivist?

ZOBRIST: Well, I think the answer would be no without the approval of my superiors, because I would not be permitted to expend government money and government staff to do anything like that. But we knew that the material was coming [with] the house, and just to add to that, this was a period before the park service really had been brought into it. Just let me lay out a couple of things here. I think you know that even after Mrs. Truman's death there was still a considerable amount of time that lapsed until the house was transferred to the park service. And I fault my superiors in Washington, because on their end they should have been talking to the park service and informing *them* what was going down out here while I out here was trying to talk with the lawyer, and the simple matter is that they were *not*. And indeed, my end of the government did not move. My superior did not even move on this. It's my understanding my superior, who was the, now deceased, assistant archivist for presidential libraries, did not even inform the archivist, his boss, of this. So, in other words, my people in Washington, although I was informing my boss, it was not getting passed on to his boss, and the big boss was not talking to the people over in the park service. And so we were at pretty much of an impasse.

SHAVER: When did things begin to move in Washington, at least on your side?

ZOBRIST: Not until after Mrs. Truman's death.

SHAVER: Did they move in a timely manner at that time?

ZOBRIST: In my estimation, no. And that is the reason that I was hung with certain

responsibilities during that interim period, and it's the reason that the government had to pick up the tab for that private guard service, which I felt was an expenditure that never really had to be incurred. But you have to realize that not only you had this period up until Mrs. Truman's death where we are inventorying as quickly and as intensively as we can, but then, you see, after her death then you've got this period where we're all sort of living in this halfway world. In fact, one of the brightest days of my life is when I saw . . . not Norm Reigle, but the young man who came out . . . Tom?

SHAVER: Richter.

ZOBRIST: Tom Richter. When I saw Tom Richter come in uniform, boy, I felt like the Marines or the cavalry had arrived! [laughter]

WILLIAMS: So, in your view, if the preparations had been made, the groundwork had been laid, the home could have been transferred much more quickly after Mrs. Truman's death?

ZOBRIST: Yes, absolutely. There is no question about it at all. In fact, I had hoped and felt that that's the way that it would be done, but there were massive delays in Washington. And indeed, getting back to the inventory, this is the reason that I wanted to inventory—and I would also use the words “and secure”—the items in the house there as quickly and as efficiently and as thoroughly as we could, because I figured that when Mrs. Truman died that the estate and the home would just be locked up and that would be it. So we worked very feverishly, especially in the days when Mrs. Truman was deteriorating very, very quickly. Do you want to talk about the inventory?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

ZOBRIST: I know that you're interviewing my people who did the inventory, and so you have to realize that I'm speaking more as an administrator sitting away from the scene, and of course I would go down to the home periodically to see what was going on and would give instructions as to how things should be done. But the way it started out, as I remember it, is we were just going to do this inventory, you know, somewhat leisurely, and to do a very thorough job of it.

WILLIAMS: Excuse me, we need to pause.

[End #4137; Begin #4138]

ZOBRIST: Okay, well, I was going to say that when we started the inventory, I felt that we would just do it on a room-by-room basis and do it somewhat leisurely. But then the two primary people that were working at the house would be Pat, her name then was Pat Kerr, and Liz Safly, people I have the highest regard for, but they began to realize and I began to realize that, my God, the house down there is sort of like Grand Central Station, what I alluded to earlier, in that there were a constant series of nurses coming through and taking care of Mrs. Truman, and then there was the young men, the Secret Service people coming in and out.

The one vivid memory that I have is one day, it was either Liz or Pat, one of them told me that . . . She asked me if I remembered the ashtray that J. Edgar Hoover had given to Mr. Truman. You know, it's the ashtray that has Mr. Truman's thumbprint in it. And she said, "You know, that's missing."

I mean, we almost had a stroke! A couple of days later they told me that they had found this ashtray, and the ashtray was out in the kitchen and one of

the nurses was *using* it. And we're about having a stroke because we would consider this as a prime artifact, to say the very least. So it's at that time when this was happening, and we were beginning to realize the situation that we intensified our effort very much, and then we . . . I told my people, I said, "Loose things like that and small things that could disappear very easily, let's secure them and bring them to the library." And so it's my remembrance that a lot of these things were brought up to the library at that time just simply and basically for security because of the amount of people going in and out of the house. And of course, in the late period of Mrs. Truman's illness, I just think that she just didn't even realize what was going on around her. And I can recall that the nurses occasionally would move her from room to room, and although we were doing this inventory fully at the instructions of Mrs. Daniel, I think I can recall them saying that Mrs. Truman didn't even recognize them. So I tell this story simply to reemphasize that the situation was, in my estimation, a very risky situation in terms of what was in the home.

WILLIAMS: Was it your original intent to remove things from the home?

ZOBRIST: No.

WILLIAMS: That came along later?

ZOBRIST: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Did you keep Margaret apprised of the situation?

ZOBRIST: Yes.

WILLIAMS: How did you do that?

ZOBRIST: I would phone her. I can recall phoning her more than once and saying that we were removing . . . and I would tell her what I was removing. And also

we kept inventories of the things that we removed. I think you need to talk with Pat and Liz about this, because they can remember this undoubtedly in more detail than I can, but you're talking to an old Army type, so to speak, and I wanted a piece of paper on everything, so that the government, and certainly the library, could never be accused of taking things that should not be taken.

But let me continue on and say that . . . a couple of other aspects. I really can't go into more detail than I have, because in my position I was simply giving instructions. But things were removed basically for security purposes. Things were also removed, for example, the letters, Mr. Truman's letters, basically because they were intended to come to the library anyway.

WILLIAMS: How did you know that?

ZOBRIST: Because that was in the will, in his will.

SHAVER: He had released all of his personal papers in the will. Is that how you recall it?

ZOBRIST: Yeah, and then we removed things that were . . . I guess the word I would use, *endangered*. And I'm thinking of things that we felt were at risk. For example, in the basement. And my God, you know, the basement was an absolute disaster in terms of there was water seeping through the basement. In fact, I can remember very vividly giving them instructions: "Don't ever stand in a pool of water and turn on a light switch in that basement or you've had it!" I mean, really, I felt that it was a high-risk situation there, and I defer to them. They can describe this, I'm certain, in a much better fashion than I can.

And then the other high-risk area was the attic. Not only do you have

an unheated attic with great extremes of heat and cold, but there were even . . . what was it, a raccoon or an opossum, whatever it was had gotten loose upstairs there and had damaged certain things? And so the things that we felt were of value, those items were removed as well. But the way that I look at it is that it was more or less of, you might say, a rescue operation.

You know, one other thing that I remember during this period, we took photographs of all of the rooms. And I know that these photographs were passed on to the park service because it was my feeling that this would certainly be the best indication of what was there, what had been there, and where it was positioned.

WILLIAMS: Well, Pat Kerr showed us photographs that she took with her own camera. Is that what you're talking about?

ZOBRIST: Yeah, that's right.

WILLIAMS: Did Margaret seem interested in the things you were finding or the progress of the inventory?

ZOBRIST: You know, let me interrupt here and ask a question. You know, I'm telling you guys exactly the way it is. Will I get a chance to read this thing?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

ZOBRIST: Okay, because I may want to, what, soften some of my statements here. But I've always found Margaret not to be interested in the things of the house—very much at all, not interested at all. Certain things, jewelry, certain things of that type she brought up and she asked me to hold here in our vaults. But another comment that I would make, and this is a true comment, if you've worked with Margaret, she many times would shoot from the hip. And I can

just hear her saying, “Oh, Ben, throw that away! Get rid of it!” And indeed I would have to say that I did not obey her instructions, and indeed let me say that if I had carried out a lot of her instructions, I mean, our collection of what we have and what you have down there at the house would be a lot thinner than it is right now.

But let me also say that, in deference to Margaret, I think you need to realize that this was a very trying period for her. I’ve lived through periods of my life like this. You know, you get very impatient, and there are things you just don’t want to be reminded of. There are memories that you would just as soon forget, you know, things of that nature. But she was very liberal in telling me, “Ben, get rid of it.”

But to move on, we did not dispose of anything. The only thing that I can think of that we actually did dispose of, and I did this, what, very discreetly, and I guess you might say with a grain of salt, in that she asked us to get rid of a lot of her mother’s clothing. You know, all she would say is, “Ben, get rid of it!” And then I got the problem of, well, how do you get rid of it? The way we handled that, to the best of my memory, is that my staff, being knowledgeable with reference to clothing, really just picked out the worst dresses and the ones that really would never be used for exhibit purposes—you know, her everyday dress, that type of thing—and these were the dresses that we disposed of. It was sort of funny how my gang did it, and you can ask them about it, but as I understand it, we wanted to be careful that no one could ever say, “Oh, I bought a Bess Truman dress at the Salvation Army,” or something like that. So my gang divided the clothing into groups,

and they dropped it off at a number of places like the Salvation Army. That's my understanding.

But again though, I've enjoyed working with the family, but perhaps I had a little more perspective, if I may put it that way, realizing that my mission, the library's mission, was to save things for posterity. And as a result, I simply did not carry out Margaret's wishes.

WILLIAMS: You mentioned the family. Did you have any other contact with other family members?

ZOBRIST: Yes, but in a minimal way. Going back, I'm afraid you're going to get an awfully scrambled tape because I'm bouncing back and forth here chronologically. One of the first things that I did when Margaret asked me to do the inventory was that I personally visited Bess's sister-in-law May Wallace, and I visited Sue Gentry, and I told them what we were about to do. And of course I also visited Mrs. Haukenberry. That's another whole story by itself. You come back and interview me on that one when you get the Haukenberry house.

WILLIAMS: Which may be soon.

ZOBRIST: Well, I'm delighted to hear that. And of course the minister.

WILLIAMS: Reverend Melton.

ZOBRIST: No, not Melton.

SHAVER: Reverend Hart.

WILLIAMS: Hart, the Episcopalian.

ZOBRIST: Yeah, the Episcopalian, yeah. Melton really never played much of a role in any of this, to the best of my knowledge. But these were people that . . . It

was a very delicate situation, and I didn't want to see in the newspaper: "Truman Library staff inventorying Truman home in preparation for Mrs. Truman's death," you know, something like that. And so this is the reason that I visited a number of people and asked them to keep our confidence, but I wanted them to know what was going on.

WILLIAMS: What happened to the objects and material that was removed from the home once it got—

ZOBRIST: They were brought up here.

WILLIAMS: And what happened to them here?

ZOBRIST: We stored them in a room, I guess a couple of rooms, and the rooms were secured, and only, what, approved people could work with it. I attempted, and I think my staff . . . I shouldn't say "I think my staff . . ." We attempted to keep all this material as secure as we could. We did, as I understand it, some preliminary, simple preservation type of work, if we could do it without spending a lot of time, and then the thing that I was a real bug on was an inventory.

WILLIAMS: So you kept an inventory of things as they came in?

ZOBRIST: Yes. My memory is somewhat hazy on that. You might want to ask Pat or Liz about this, but the way I remember it is that we would spend a number of days down at the house, and then we would spend a number of days up here inventorying. However, I would say that when we got down toward the end when Mrs. Truman was just really terminally ill—I mean, it was very, very hectic—and I feel that it was somewhat of a problem to keep on course, so to speak. But we did the best we could. And then I think you also have to

remember, and not to belabor you with my problems, I mean, this whole operation in essence just came out of my hide, because it meant I was diverting people from other responsibilities at the library to do this. And indeed, if I had had more staff, and I guess I would have to say more understanding from my people in Washington, this could have been done in a much more efficient way. But in retrospect, though, although it was a very hectic period for all of us, it was in many respects an emotional period that we were going through. In retrospect, when I look at where we are today in 1990, I think my gang really did an outstanding job, and I would repeat myself in saying that you wouldn't have the home you have there today if it were not for all of the anguish and gyrations and manipulations, and etcetera etcetera, that we went through during that period.

SHAVER: Your superiors in Washington, was there any reluctance on their part to see this take place?

WILLIAMS: Did you inform them that you were doing it?

ZOBRIST: Oh, yes. Yes. No, I wouldn't say that there was any reluctance on their part as far as the inventory. But I would have to say that I was yelling for more help—personnel—all the time, and they were not listening to me. Of course, they probably had other problems perhaps that they figured were bigger than mine, but from my point of view this was a real strain on the staff. But really, where I fault my people in Washington was in the transfer of the home, and here is where I felt that they were definitely not responsive in carrying that thing through in a timely and efficient way.

SHAVER: That's interesting. Our folklore always has the paper put on somebody's

desk in the Interior Department. I never felt like GSA had been—

ZOBRIST: Well, I think that if you check it out . . . No, let me say that I've heard that, too, and I think that there was some delay and reluctance over in your end of the government, but I'm talking about the delay that I saw in getting it over on somebody's desk over in the park service.

WILLIAMS: We usually blame the Secretary of the Interior. [chuckling] He at that time was not a very . . .

SHAVER: Ike Skelton had no problem in blaming him.

ZOBRIST: Well, let me also add that when it got to that point, I would certainly speak very highly of Ike Skelton and the role that he played. Ike has been a good friend of the library, and I know that he knows Margaret personally, and Margaret feels comfortable in speaking with him directly, so Ike can take credit for what transpired as well.

SHAVER: Did you have any contact with Senator Eagleton or Mr. Skelton about this issue? Did their staffs contact you?

ZOBRIST: No, not really. I did not. In my end of the government, and at least in those days, and I will not give you a history of the National Archives, but I was discouraged very, very much from speaking to any political individual.

I guess I would need to add one further statement to that, and this is another whole story all by itself. My organization was going through major organizational changes, and my organization was having tremendous problems with General Services Administration, of which we were a part. And it's during this whole period, all of these years, that my organization was fighting for independence. As you know, we're now an independent agency. I don't

want to get you into a lot of detail on that story, but I think that . . . Again going back to what I have stated earlier, you have to remember that I had a big library here with a lot of problems and new programs that I was operating at the same time that a lot of this . . . the home was unfolding.

SHAVER: Viewed in that perspective, we can certainly understand. [chuckling] Did you have much contact with the estate or the representatives of the estate during this period, Mr. Chisholm or any representatives of that?

ZOBRIST: Oh, of the estate? Oh, yes, I had a lot of contact with Don Chisholm. You see, by that time Arthur Mag had died. Yes, I have very, very high regard for Don Chisholm, both as a lawyer and as an individual. He worked very closely with the library, and in many respects I feel that he eased the way for us. I would add, also, I think he represented his client, the Truman family, very well. But at the same time, Don understood our interests. And when I say "our interests," our interests in the papers and our interests, the government interests, in the home.

You know, I think you already realize this, but the park service was not even in the picture at this time. There was nobody in the park service that I was talking to, although I had a couple of unofficial calls that I made to Ernest Connelly, but I had no official contact with the park service. And I felt that here I was left to hang out and dry, so to speak, as an archivist and as the senior government type here, you know, really trying to represent the interests not only of my agency but also thinking in terms of the park service.

SHAVER: Where do you think they began to come into the picture? Was it here at this level or there at the Washington level?

ZOBRIST: To the best of my knowledge, they came into play when Tom Richter arrived that day, and that was it. To the best of my knowledge, I mean, they had no contact with me, and I think that this is a question you ought to ask Don Chisholm, but I think that he would probably give you the same thing. Because I can remember conversations back and forth between the two of us, and he would call me and ask me, "Well, what do you know?" And then I'd call him and ask him what did he know. And usually neither one of us knew anything.

WILLIAMS: To your knowledge, was Mr. Chisholm in the home after Mrs. Truman died?

ZOBRIST: Yes. In fact, after Mrs. Truman died he consulted with me, in terms of how do we secure the home. Oh, gee, I am doing this from memory. I think that Margaret gave him a key to the house, and she gave me a key to the house. Have you talked with anybody else about that? I just don't remember. But I think that's the way that it went. And I encouraged him to hire a guard service for the . . . not to go in the home but to guard the perimeter of the home. So Don and I worked together and would meet periodically, and of course we were in touch over the telephone, in terms of how things were going in getting the home transferred to the park service.

WILLIAMS: Were any things removed from the home in that two-and-a-half-month period after Mrs. Truman's death?

ZOBRIST: I honestly do not remember.

WILLIAMS: Were you in the home?

ZOBRIST: Yes. Yes, I was in the home. Let me say this, that whenever I or any of my staff went in the home we always used what I call the buddy system, in that no

single person ever went into the home individually. So there were always, whenever I or any of my people went in the home, there were always two or more individuals. I guess that this goes back to my Army training and intelligence training and all the security and all of that kind of stuff, but I felt very, very strongly that, even though I had been given the key, I did not want anyone to ever say that Zobrist went in by himself or anyone else went in by themselves. I feel very, very strongly about this issue, and to the best of my knowledge, I think that we adhered to it very scrupulously.

WILLIAMS: To your knowledge, did Mrs. Daniel or her family take things out of the house as they were leaving from the funeral or any time when you were in custody of the home?

ZOBRIST: Yes. Yes, after the funeral . . . I think it was after the funeral, yeah. Margaret asked me to go through the home with her, and again. You know, to give my reaction, it was a . . . This probably is not the right word, but I felt it was a good experience from the government's point of view, in that she took hardly anything out of the home. Really, I don't know that I want to see this in black and white on tape, but to just give you an example of . . . I think this is a good story because it shows how authentic the home is. When we went through the bedroom, I think that she took her mother's false teeth and her comment was, "I don't want to leave this in the house." See, something like that. Unless you've found a set of false teeth [laughter].

SHAVER: No, no. I remembered that story.

ZOBRIST: Yeah. And, uh . . .

[End #4138; Begin #4139]

ZOBRIST: To Margaret, this was just to me . . . I guess I would say a warm experience. I mean, she went through the home, making comments, sort of reminiscing, but very little . . . I cannot remember anything, her taking anything of any real significance out of the home.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember any of the comments she made other than about the false teeth?

ZOBRIST: Well, that I remember very vividly. And you get into small little things like this. She picked up . . . oh, if I remember, a couple of watches and said, "I want you to send these on to me so I can give them to the boys." And again I can recall her going through a drawer with some of Mr. Truman's shirts, and it just sort of blew my mind, with her affluence and living in New York City, and she said, "Well, send three or four of these shirts," that type of thing. But that was the experience. It was, I think, a very warm experience, a good experience, and the home was kept very, very much intact.

WILLIAMS: Did Margaret ever express an opinion about the National Park Service to you?

ZOBRIST: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: When she first found out?

ZOBRIST: Yeah. [chuckling] I could say at least originally she did not have very high regards for the park service.

WILLIAMS: Why was that?

ZOBRIST: Well, [chuckling] I think, in my estimation, that it was because of the park service sites, historical sites that she had visited. I can remember her making comments about, "You know, I visited such and such a home, and it just

wasn't done right. And I visited another home, and they had put plexiglas up so that you had to look through the room through plexiglas." You know, I don't think that she had anything personally against the National Park Service, but she just was not enamored with the way the park service had presented a lot of historical properties.

WILLIAMS: Did she draw any parallels to the Roosevelt family in dealing with the park service?

ZOBRIST: No, I never heard her say anything like that.

SHAVER: Does she have a summer home on Fire Island, to your knowledge?

ZOBRIST: No, they rent that out there, to the best of my knowledge.

SHAVER: Because we'd gotten an impression that maybe some of her initial adverse feelings toward us may have been resulting towards some policies that the park service had had on Fire Island.

ZOBRIST: Well, it may be because they vacationed out there a number of summers. But I think that—I could get on another tangent. [chuckling] I think that Margaret does not like the sand and sun and the surf, and I have the feeling that she went out there basically for the kids, for the boys. And now that the boys are all raised and gone, I don't think she's ever going to go out to Fire Island again. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Okay. Did she ever tell you that she wished the home would not be open to the public?

ZOBRIST: She didn't express it in exactly those words, but Margaret was very adamant about the upper floor not being on display. And I've always sensed that . . . How do I say it the right way? I've always sensed that she has felt that the

public interest in the family is an intrusion, and I've had the feeling that her and her family's privacy are a lot more important to her than the story of her father and the administration and that type of thing. I think, though, that you have to understand her background and her own experience. And if you've lived in the public eye the way she has, and remember going back to the kidnapping attempt on her when she was a schoolchild here in Independence, to the great publicity, both pro and con, of her singing career, and everything else, that I think that a person in the public eye like that, you get to a point where you've just more or less had it, so to speak. And I think that her feeling toward the public is more that.

Do let me add to that, though, that you're asking me to make a judgment on a feeling that . . . I've known her for twenty years and I have the feeling that her feeling has evolved to the point where now she has very good words to say about the park service. I think it's largely because you people have done such a good job in the way you have presented the home, and so when I talk to her nowadays . . . You know, early on when you people first came on the scene, she wouldn't even talk to the park service. It was always—I'd get the telephone—and it was, "Ben, you tell Norm to do . . ." [laughter] and then I got the laundry list.

This is one of the reasons that we might move into our relations with Norm. I think very highly of Norm, as an individual, but totally aside from that, Norm and I got along together very well. My feeling was that in this whole story we've told today, I've always felt that I'm working for my end of the government as well as working for your end of the government, because

we're all really trying to tell the Truman story. But in any event, I purposely invited Norm and his wife, when the occasion was proper, I invited them to festivities and openings and occasions that we would have at the library because it gave Margaret a chance to meet, talk with Norm, and to give him more exposure so that he and the park service would be meeting with her, let's say, in a social scene rather than always on an official level. And I'm real pleased personally. I don't know how you fellows feel, but I'm personally very pleased with where we are now in our relationship with the family.

WILLIAMS: Did you offer Tom or Norm any advice on how to deal with Margaret?

ZOBRIST: Yes, I did. [chuckling] Although, you know, again my feeling is I don't feel that I should impose my feelings on other people, so I'd have to say Norm learned a lot of this on his own. But Norm and I worked very closely together, and I would simply say Norm reciprocated and Norm has saved my hide more than once, as well as I think I have saved his hide a few times. So it's been a real good relationship. But again, you know, when you are working with a person like Margaret, I mean, we're all trying to do the right thing, and I think that sometimes Margaret tends to make very quick decisions, and I think Norm and I always felt that if we could help each other in telling the other person's side of the story or what needs to be done, that if we all work together it would work out much better.

WILLIAMS: Why did you offer the park service office space here at the Truman library in 1983?

ZOBRIST: Well, because I'm just such a great guy. [laughter]

SHAVER: You've taken in all sorts of stray federal agencies.

ZOBRIST: No, I'm being very facetious. Well, basically because at that point in time we did have the room. I think it's because we had the room, because it would save the park service going through the contracting and all of that red tape. Thirdly, I think that we felt that by working together, the curators working together, that we could learn from each other. And do let me say that . . . I can't think of the name of the curator you had before.

SHAVER: Steve Harrison?

ZOBRIST: Was it Steve?

SHAVER: It was Steve Harrison.

ZOBRIST: Yes, Harrison. Steve, we thought, was a very competent guy. We were sorry to see him leave. And we learned a lot of things from him; I'm certain it was mutual. You know, let me make one other observation that I think you realize. When we secured all of this material and brought a lot of it up here, subsequently Steve and now my curator Clay [Bauske], we've had a good relationship, in terms of when we have found things that we feel rightly belong to the house, we have transferred things down there. And I think that you people have reciprocated in certain things where . . . I think one that I think of, where we have a gun that came out of the house and you had the holster for the gun. So it's just a matter of getting all of this together.

And then one other point that . . . and I'm certain that you've asked Pat and Liz about this, but let me make this . . . This is a point I feel very strongly about. We talked about all of these inventories. Margaret has looked over all of these inventories. They have all been sent to her, and they were sent to her essentially in terms of asking her: "Where do you want this

stuff to go? What do you want to be done with it? And you can see where she has annotated many times, you know, "This belongs in the house." And there have been some things where she said, "This I want. Send this to me." And then there have been other things that have gone into the library, and there also are a few items, you know, "Get rid of," that type of thing.

So let me say that from my point of view I have never looked at the inventory of the home as like "yours" and "ours." I have always viewed this, and Norm and I had many conversations about this and I feel that we have seen eye-to-eye on it, and I think that we have looked at it more in terms of you should have all of the things down at the house that will exhibit the house so that the public can see it in the best way. I think that Norm and I have felt that it was silly to leave stuff in closets that the public would never see and stuff that would be in the closets, and if it stayed in the closets it would just continue to deteriorate, so you might just as well put it in an atmosphere or in an area where we can preserve the things properly.

And then I think that we've always had, at least verbally, the understanding that . . . You know, Norm and I have talked about this many times. If you people are doing special exhibits or if you want to do a room in a special way, like a Christmas exhibit or something like that, if we have up here things that you need, no problems in exchanging things back and forth. And I might say that you may remember when we did the Greta Kempton exhibit here at the library. One of the great pieces that she has done is the painting of Margaret in the home. Of course, we couldn't strip the home of that because, my God, you'd just have a blank wall there. But on the other

hand, for the opening of that exhibit, Norm was kind enough to let us have it for about three or four days so at the opening of the exhibit we had the whole thing altogether. I could go on and give you a lot of other examples, but I feel that it has been a very good arrangement, and to the best of my knowledge, it's worked out very well.

WILLIAMS: Was there any question of ownership of this material that was removed from the home after Mrs. Truman's death?

ZOBRIST: Well, I think I would . . . The way I would answer that question, and maybe I'm not telling you what you want, but in my estimation there was never any question of ownership. It was all Margaret's! And this is the basis on which those inventories were made and we operated, because we did not acquisition or process anything until Margaret had signed off on it. And I would have to say the only things that I really . . . The only thing I was adamant about is to carry out the major mission of my agency, and that is the papers. And there I would occasionally remind Margaret that, you know, this was in Mr. Truman's will, and it was the full intention that that material come to the library, to the government.

SHAVER: You had to talk to her at least on that point about his papers and his material?

ZOBRIST: Yeah. Yeah, but I've never had any real difficulties with her on this. Boy, here I'm opening up another real can of worms. The only, I guess you might say, real problem that we ever had was the icon. You guys know the icon story?

SHAVER: Oh, let's hear your version of it. We'll probably learn a lot more. [chuckling]

ZOBRIST: Well, I'm not going to go into great detail. In that period after Mrs. Truman's

death and until the park service got here, I would get these phone calls from Margaret, and she would say, "I want you to take so and so through the house to see the house." And one of the people that she called and gave me direct . . . And you realize this is before it had been transferred to the government, that she told me to take through the house was Sam Gallu. Sam Gallu goes through the house, and I guess in a subsequent conversation she . . . . In a subsequent conversation Sam told her what a great visit it was, and then Sam told her, "Margaret, I would never leave that icon in the house." And so I got a direct order from Margaret, saying that the icon was hers and that the icon should be removed and she would make arrangements for it to be sent to her. And I'm not going to go into all of this excruciating story, but that's exactly what happened. She took it to New York City, and at that time . . . . And this was duly reported to my people in Washington, and I was not about to confront Margaret on this because she was so adamant, but my end of the government got in touch with her and retrieved the icon. And so the [icon] is now back in our possession, and the last time I heard, it is still being *preserved*. Here we get into a matter that still needs to be talked out with the park service. You know, I have no problems in talking about this, but this is an issue that Ron Mack and I will have to resolve one of these days. I don't have any particular desire to have that icon, even though in a sense it belongs on my end of the government. I have not even talked with Ron Mack about this, but Norm and I had discussed it. Norm's position was, because you don't have humidity control and temperature control down there, that he didn't want it and that the park service would rather put up a reproduction.

Now that was the last turn of the screw, so to speak. And I would have to say I personally have no strong feelings one way or the other.

WILLIAMS: Well, it would be nice to have something instead of the blank wall that's there now.

ZOBRIST: Yeah. But as I say, my end of the government, we have no strong feelings one way or the other. But this is an issue that I think needs to be resolved when we get the icon and we can see what the thing looks like. But this is the only real excruciating experience that came out of the whole transfer.

WILLIAMS: Did Mrs. Daniel ever say to you that "there are just certain things that I don't want anyone to see, and as long as I'm alive, the park service can't have access to any . . ."? This is an issue that's of particular interest to me, because when I was doing research the first summer I was here I was informed that some Bibles had been removed, family Bibles, and I was doing genealogy. I guess, as I found out later, it was probably a misunderstanding, but I was told that I couldn't look at those because they were in the closed area. Later Norm told me that if he had known, he was sure that I could have seen them.

ZOBRIST: Oh, yeah.

WILLIAMS: I was wondering if there was still any question, if those are considered part of Mrs. Truman's papers and those cannot be used?

ZOBRIST: I honestly can't answer that question.

WILLIAMS: Mrs. Truman's papers are still closed. Is that correct?

ZOBRIST: I guess, some of them.

WILLIAMS: Whenever we ask, that's what we're told: "Margaret hasn't signed off on them."

SHAVER: Some sort of legal haze.

ZOBRIST: Yeah. Boy, I haven't thought about that for a long time. You know, really I just draw a blank. I just really don't know where we are on that, and I don't think I really ought to expound on it because my mind is so hazy on this. You know, really, I was not aware of your not being able to see the Bible or any of that other stuff. And I can't think of any good reason why you weren't shown it, other than that you probably were . . . my staff may have thought you were a temporary or whatever and just flying through, or something like that.

WILLIAMS: Well, I was. [laughter]

ZOBRIST: Because our policy is that we really don't make materials available to researchers, and I think that that's probably the category that you fell into. We don't make materials available to researchers until it's in our possession.

WILLIAMS: Meaning legally in your possession?

ZOBRIST: Yeah, legally. Yeah, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Even if it was this material for the park service?

ZOBRIST: Well, if somebody had asked me about this case, I would have said, "My God, no problem with this." But what I am saying is that in all of the other collections that we have the official policy is we can't show anything to a researcher until it's legally been deeded to the government. But if I had known about this, I would have made an exception. I don't see any problems with something like this.

WILLIAMS: That's what Norm told me later, but by that time the summer was over and it was too late. Did you ever envision the park service permanently operating out of the Truman Library?

ZOBRIST: Say that again?

WILLIAMS: Did you ever envision the park service operating permanently out of the Truman Library facilities?

ZOBRIST: No, I never did. But we have, at least we had at that time, enough space that we were willing to consider it, but really, from our point of view, only on a temporary basis. And I would have to say that as more time has evolved, I think that that really . . . The only word that comes to my mind is the healthiest arrangement is for us to operate the way we are. Because I guess I feel that we, in a sense, both have different missions, and I think that if we were to mix the pot together that we may not get, let's say, as good a stew or whatever as I think that we have gotten. A lot of things come to my mind. I think you realize that the park service and our end of the government have not had over the years good relationships in the Hoover Library, and I guess even at the Roosevelt Library. The director of the Eisenhower Library, now retired, [chuckling] I get a kick out of him. He would always say, "Don't let the park service in because you'll have a situation like with the Hoover Library or the Roosevelt Library." But as things have evolved, I strongly think this is the best way all the way around. I have no questions about it at all. You know, really, when we were offering space, it only would have been on a temporary basis, because you remember Norm and the gang were burned out, so to speak.

WILLIAMS: Speaking of "the gang," how would you describe their occupation, sort of, at the library and their dealings with your staff, and just the whole atmosphere?

ZOBRIST: I think it's real positive. I really mean it. In fact, I'm delighted to have you

people around because, for example, I wish that we had the staff and the time to do tapes like you're doing right now, and I hope that we can get copies of what you're doing. So I feel that you have been a plus all the way around. I mean, I can think of nothing negative at all. I think we work together very well. I think we realize that we have different missions, we have different roles.

Really, you've asked the question, so I'm going to take the opportunity to even put in another plug. You know, I would really like to see your end of the government take the Truman farm home. I know that there are a lot of bureaucratic reasons as to why it should not happen, including money and that type of thing, but really I think that the park service, not only the park service but the park service in particular, but I think all of us who are interested in the Truman story can do a lot better job if we had your agency with its expertise doing that part of the Truman story. I think it's a natural.

**WILLIAMS:** Well, before the home opened, how did you see the addition of the Truman home to the public, changing the visitor's experience to Independence?

**ZOBRIST:** Very positive. And I've been in this town long enough that when I first came to town, I mean, what was there to see? All there was to see was the auditorium, the Truman Library, and the jail. Oh God, we could talk all morning about this, or all afternoon, and I think, as you know, I'm involved in a lot of civic things, the heritage commission . . .

In fact, by the way, realize . . . Let me just clarify that point. The only reason I got involved in the heritage commission is because the park service wasn't around. And with my agency's concurrence, I've always taken a

strong role in the heritage commission because I felt that the government needed to be represented. I would be very happy to resign and give the job to Ron Mack, really.

[End #4139; Begin #4140]

ZOBRIST: But let me say that, getting back on track, that I'm involved in a lot of things, including right now I'm the chairman, they just reelected me, of Uptown Independence. I like this community. I think it has a lot of potential historically, and I look at the park service as being a very large part of that whole package. I could go on in much greater detail but . . . [chuckling] Anything else?

SHAVER: That's the end of the tape.

WILLIAMS: Well, if you wouldn't mind, maybe we could set an indefinite time to continue the story in the next few years. [chuckling]

ZOBRIST: Okay. Well, I'll tell you, you know, one of the things you might want to do is talk about the heritage district and . . .

WILLIAMS: Oh, I have that on the list.

ZOBRIST: Oh God, well, that's a whole afternoon all by itself!

SHAVER: Yeah, well, we've got another order for tapes. [chuckling]

ZOBRIST: Yeah, and, oh man, that'll get my blood pressure up. And there are several other people I think you need to talk with. You know, this damn town, it's like it's two steps forward and then one step backwards, and we just keep going back and forth like that. And I thought that with Barbara Potts that we were finally getting our act together, and we were on the right track historically in a lot of other ways, and now we're back to square one again.

WILLIAMS: I would like to talk or have somebody talk to you more about the planning and the coordination of things, but I realize I can wait for another time.

ZOBRIST: Well, you might want to do that after you get the home—I mean, get that property.

SHAVER: We have heard some discussion with Norm and you, about Mr. Southern and about that incident and how it ended up.

ZOBRIST: That's right. I just cannot forgive him for the way that he handled that. And again, I just ache over that whole situation. And you have to see it from my point of view. Not too long after Mr. Truman died, and you see this was years before Mrs. Truman was to pass on and the house came to the park service, Mrs. Haukenberry told me that she was willing to give that house to the government, and I assume with everything in it. I can remember . . . let me talk about my agency, and they had . . . You know, we didn't have the money or any way of doing it. And I can remember, I think I called Ernest Connelly at the time. I just think he's a great guy. He's still living, isn't he?

SHAVER: Yeah, he's still very active with the park service.

ZOBRIST: He was such a neat guy. And he told me, he tried to give me some ideas as to how it might be done, but nothing ever happened. But if certain things would have been in place, and again, you know, I won't go on and on because we've taken so much time, and I've taken your time too, but I look at this Truman story, and if people would have died earlier or later than they did and things like that, I mean, this could have been so different! Mrs. Haukenberry at one point in time asked me to come down, and she talked very positively about transferring that whole house to the government. But what really burns

me is that damn Southern. I mean, you guys are going to get the house, but you could have gotten the house with everything in it.

WILLIAMS: I remember before she died—

SHAVER: Interesting that you and Norm call him by the same first name.

ZOBRIST: Oh, yeah. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: I remember before she died that her nurses had even supposedly straightened up and thrown out a bunch of her papers and things. Just that things like that happened that are very frustrating.

ZOBRIST: Yeah, but that I'm very frustrated about. But on the other hand, really and honestly I think that when I look back on my life and what I've done, I am very proud of the Truman home. And although there were a few bumps and grinds in the whole process, I just think it's an outstanding story. And not to belabor the issue, but it is fun to talk about all this stuff. When I talk with the people at the Roosevelt Library and the people at the other libraries, but in particular I think at the Eisenhower Library, I mean, that experience really sort of tipped me off and made me very apprehensive and cautious about the Truman story because . . . And you probably know this story, but the Gettysburg home out there, apparently Mrs. Eisenhower, if anybody'd come in and say, "Oh, I'd like to have that," I mean, she just gave the damn thing away! And she gave a lot of stuff to the Secret Service, and she was not thinking of the library, so John Whitman just got what was left over. And so this story is so different from that story.

But again, you're dealing with individuals. I like Margaret, and she and I, we get along fine. I've had her all the way from . . . I hope this tape

thing is off, but I've had her all the way on the phone from her just being as kind to me as she possibly could, to crying, to screaming at me over the phone. But over the years, I have tried to cultivate a good, positive relation with her, and I, in my small little world, I feel that I had a hand, and I'm glad if I did have a hand, in sort of getting her off the ceiling and getting her to the point where she'd take a more positive attitude.

WILLIAMS: Well, when I get frustrated I just remind myself of the Eisenhower home, and also how much Margaret could have taken if she had had more of an interest in it.

ZOBRIST: Yeah, that's right.

WILLIAMS: It is very reassuring or comforting to know that she did take very few things and was concerned.

ZOBRIST: Well, in fact, that thing there belongs to her, but she says, "Ben, I don't have any place to put it in my apartment." So, great, I've got it. [chuckling] That's a story. You know, really it's a good, positive story. I guess the only thing I would say lastly is please let me read this thing before we make it public, because I have no qualms in saying things the way they are, but I just . . .

SHAVER: We can wait a year or two.

ZOBRIST: I would not want to offend Margaret. And again, realize that Margaret is still on my board and I still have things that I'm negotiating with her on. She still has Truman letters that I want, and so this is the reason that I have to be careful in what I'm saying. I don't want to offend her in any way.

WILLIAMS: We're not as efficient as you are about getting transcripts, so it may be many, many years before anyone gets to see this. Thank you for visiting with us.

ZOBRIST: Well, thank you. It's been a lot of fun, and I really sincerely mean it, that I have enjoyed the park service being here.

END OF INTERVIEW

